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DOMENICI BLASTS ADMINISTRATION ON FOOT DRAGGING TO IMPROVE DOE, NATIONAL LAB SECURITY

Senate Confirms Head of DOE-Lab Management Reform Administrator

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today endorsed efforts to “get to the bottom” of the apparent loss of secret and sensitive nuclear weapons data from Los Alamos National Laboratory, but also blasted the Clinton administration for stonewalling efforts to implement management and security reforms at the nation’s nuclear weapons laboratories.

Domenici, who led the effort last year to create the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), to oversee the nation’s nuclear weapons facilities, also voted today to confirm Air Force Gen. John Gordon to become the first head of the NNSA, the new semi-autonomous Department of Energy agency created by Congress to oversee a massive management overhaul of the nation’s nuclear weapons complex.

Gordon’s confirmation vote (97-0) occurred during a joint Senate hearing to begin investigating the apparent loss of sensitive nuclear weapons data at LANL. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, on which Domenici serves, and the Senate Intelligence Committee conducted the hearing.

“This new situation at Los Alamos throws a great weight on hundreds of some very great scientists and people who work at the lab. Between all of us we will get to the bottom of this without destroying innocent lives. But we must find out what happened,” Domenici said.

Domenici then turned his attention to foot dragging by the Clinton administration and DOE Secretary Bill Richardson in implementing the NNSA, which was passed by Congress and signed into law last October.

“Despite the adamant assurances from the administration and everyone at DOE that security at our national laboratories could be taken care of within the department’s existing structure. That obviously hasn’t happened. It cannot happen because DOE’s management is dysfunctional,” Domenici said. “The administration and Secretary Richardson need to follow the law and begin the process of reorganizing management and security at our nuclear weapons labs.”

“We have to give Gen. Gordon the time and latitude to look at the problems and begin fixing them. I don’t believe we can fix these problems without someone having authority to do it from top to bottom. That cannot be done under DOE’s current structure,” he said.

Last October, President Clinton signed into law the legislation that created the semi-autonomous NNSA within DOE to manage the U.S. nuclear weapons complex. The NNSA, the brainchild of Domenici, Senators Jon Kyl, Frank Murkowski, John Warner and others, will provide streamlined management for the DOE nuclear weapons laboratories and related facilities, naval reactors, nonproliferation and materials disposition, and weapons counter-intelligence and security measures.

Formation of the NNSA closely followed the recommendations of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), which studied the DOE’s management of the national laboratories in the wake of allegations of Chinese espionage. The PFIAB report reconfirmed other previous reports citing security breeches and a DOE managerial system that fostered a rampant lack of accountability at the national labs and throughout DOE.